

MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC MEETING OF THE
ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' SERVICES (ADVS)
ADVISORY COMMISSION
HELD THURSDAY, MARCH 10, 2005

A public meeting of the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS) Advisory Commission was called to order on March 10, 2005 at 10:01 a.m. at the Arizona State Veteran Home, 4141 North Third Street, Phoenix, Arizona.

Advisory Commission Members

Present:

Webb Ellis, Chairperson
Joan Sisco, Vice Chairperson
Robert Boyd
Larry Brown
Linda Fulkerson
Mary Ellen Piotrowski
Phillip Quochytewa
Robert Sigholtz

ADVS Staff

Present:

Patrick F. Chorpenning, Director, ADVS
Luella Emmons, Asst. Deputy Director, ADVS
Susan Aguinaldo, Asst. Administrator, ASVH
Gabe Forsberg, Strategic Planner

Commissioners Not in Attendance: Special Guests:

Tom Dingwall

Lee Borgen, VBC, Lake Havasu City

Webb Ellis, Advisory Commission Chairperson determined that a quorum was present. Commissioner Dingwall was excused from the meeting at the February meeting. The meeting was opened with the Pledge of Allegiance. The Chairperson thanked the Director and Susan Aguinaldo, the Administrator for the Arizona State Veteran Home, for the tour and briefing prior to the meeting and reminded the Commissioners that the agency tour would be continued after the business meeting concluded. The February 10, 2005 minutes were approved as written.

Veterans First, Ltd.

Joan Sisco made a presentation on Veterans First, Ltd. (VFL) in preparation of the April presentation to all military service organizations. She serves as the President of VFL. The purpose of the April meeting is to introduce the Commissioners, discuss the veteran outreach program and the strategic plan, to solicit their input on the work done by the Commissioners, and discuss how Veterans First, Ltd will interface with the objectives of the Commission.

Commissioner Sisco provided background on the formation of the organization about two years ago in order to obtain 501(c)(3) status to better serve the veteran community. Individual non-profit organizations used to be established for each and every veteran-focused event, which increased event costs. VFL provides the tax-exempt status required by businesses and individuals who require tax deductions, serving as a clearing house for donations.

VFL is not a government entity, but its objectives are intentionally aligned with the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services and its Advisory Commission. VFL collaborates with federal and state agencies, the VA Medical Center Women Veteran Coordinator, National Association of State Departments of Veterans Affairs, National Association of State Women Veteran Coordinators & Commissioners, veterans service organizations, the Arizona National Guard & Reserve members and their families, and the general public.

VFL encourages returning Arizona National Guard and Reservists to join military service organizations so they receive the support so critically needed upon return from active duty. One of its objectives is to support veteran organizations, which in turn strengthens the entire veteran community.

The annual Congressional Medal of Honor Society convention will be held in Phoenix this September: VFL is heavily involved with securing donations for the event. Approximately 60 recipients are expected (the youngest is 56 years old and the oldest recipient is 94). The total cost for the event is estimated at \$675,000 and none of those costs will be borne by the CMOH recipients themselves.

Strategic Plan

A motion was made to formally adopt the draft strategic plan presented during the February 10, 2005 meeting. It was unanimously approved by the Advisory Commission.

Arizona Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS) Reports:

Susan Aguinaldo, Assistant Administrator - Arizona State Veteran Home (ASVH), successfully passed both her national and state administrator examinations. The Director wanted to inform the Commissioners before making an announcement to the agency.

Director Chorpenning provided a one-page report outlining agency financial information. Essentially, we are two-thirds of the way through this budget year and the agency's finances are on target. The FY 2006 budget is still working its way through the legislative process at this time.

ADVS Director Reports (not specific to the agency):

Director Chorpenning announced a proposed \$6 billion reduction in Medicaid funding (called Arizona Long Term Care or LTCs in Arizona). The decrease potentially affects low income residents of the state veteran home.

There are issues arising from this war that returning veterans have never experienced. With body armor, military personnel are surviving injuries that would have been fatal in the past. Traumatic brain injuries (TBI) result from service members being close to explosions. The number of amputees is also significantly higher than in other combat situations.

The US Army has experienced difficulties with recruiting (down by 27%) and the Marine Corps has not met its recruitment quotas for the first time in twelve years. General Rataczek reports that Arizona has 300 fewer recruits than it needs for the Arizona National Guard. Arizona will receive an alert in August to activate a National Guard unit.

Arizona National Guard personnel coming back from Iraq frequently forgo a physical as they are being out-processed. Such physical examinations establish any medical or psychological issues before the troops return, but they require the service member to stay an additional two to three weeks before returning home. Nearly every service member signs a waiver to avoid the exam.

- The US Department of Veterans Affairs Regional Director's Office is committed to bringing information to the returning Guard member and Reservist. Sandy Flynn, the Director, and Jon Skelly, Assistant Director of the VA Regional Office have consistently demonstrated

support for returning troops and has forged a working partnership with the Arizona Department of Veterans Services.

- ADVS and the US Department of Veterans Affairs will be available for a four to six hour briefing when the service member returns to their unit. This allows the family of the returning service member to learn about their rightful benefits (such as education, documenting potential disabilities, obtaining benefits from the VA Medical Center, etc.).
- An agency Veterans Benefit Counselor will be schedule times to be available to the returning service personnel and families following the briefing.
- After fine-tuning the pilot program to debrief returning National Guard and Reservists, the program will be documented for potential use by other regions.

There are three states where their state departments of veterans affairs (the ADVS counterpart) where they operate home loan programs. Texas, California, and Wisconsin are able to loan money to veterans to purchase homes and use interest payments as revenue. These programs also help veterans obtain lower interest loans than traditional funding sources.

Unified Arizona Veterans (UAV)

Certain legislation had been introduced at the Arizona Legislature that initially appeared to be supportive of veterans. In reality, the bills do not meet the needs of the veteran community. Chairman Ellis offered to prepare a letter to the Governor that indicates opposition to these types of bills and propose that she form a veterans' task force. The primary purpose of the task force would be to study legislative issues of importance to veterans and prepare a final report of its recommendations in December 2005. The report would serve as a basis for an omnibus bill for veterans issues to be introduced in the 2006 legislative session. The Commissioners unanimously supported the preparation of the letter to the Governor.

Adjournment

Seven of the Advisory Commissioners will be attending the National Association of Departments of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) conference in Washington, D.C. from March 20 through March 24. Director Chorprenning indicated that Arizona will have the largest delegation at this meeting.

The next scheduled Advisory Commission meeting is Thursday, April 14, 2005 at 10:00 a.m. at the Arizona State Veteran Home, 4141 North Third Street, Phoenix, Arizona.

Commissioner Ellis called for adjournment. The meeting adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

Thru: _____
Patrick F. Chorprenning, Director

Date: _____

Accepted by: _____
Webb Ellis, Chairperson

Date: _____

Recorder/Transcriber: _____
Gabe Forsberg, Strategic Planner